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### Ministry to the Single Young Adult

David Prinz

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir\_prinzd@cs1.edu

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MINISTRY TO THE SINGLE YOUNG ADULT

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A Research Paper Presented to the Faculty  
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by

David C. Prinz

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*Arthur C. Stepp*

Advisor

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## MINISTRY TO THE SINGLE YOUNG ADULT

### Defining the Problem

The ministry of the Gospel encompasses and is inclusive of all humanity in whatever the situation and wherever that situation might be. The approach of ministry may vary, the communicating words may vary, but yet the message is the same unwavering and unchangeable good news of God's love made revelatory in Jesus Christ. The ministry of the Gospel carries the same message to the rural American as it carries to the cold water flats in the sprawling metropolitan areas. But, the ways and the means in which this one truth from God is conveyed takes on a great incidence of differences.

At the present time the church is painfully aware of the fact that there are human situations and population segments which have not been penetrated and ministered to by the power of the Word. The reasons for this are numerous. Want of manpower and a deficiency of financial ability are some of the reasons. Perhaps the greatest reason for the failure of the penetration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the lack of understanding. First of all, the church may not have a solid definition of its own theology of mission.<sup>1</sup> Without such a study, work cannot be carried out effectively. Then, the church may not realize the implications and the ramifications of the existential moment of these "isolated" human situations

and population segments. It may not realize the needs and may not hear the communication of those needs by the certain and varied groups within the whole population. This paper will attempt to reflect the present concept of ministry to one such human situation and population segment, the life situation of the single young adult in the metropolitan area. This particular population segment and life situation group is relatively new in arriving on the American cultural scene. The postwar baby boom is now entering the young adult period which is categorized with the ages of eighteen through twenty-four. It is difficult to limit the age to twenty four, however, for there are possibilities that the ideals, mode of living and cohesiveness of the group may push the age group to thirty years of age.<sup>2</sup> Presently there are approximately 30 million people in this age group. Figures have been given to estimate that by 1970 this age group will increase by sixty five per cent while the rest of the population will increase by seventeen percent. And again, at the present there are three and a half million students in colleges throughout the United States. By 1970 the enrollment of the colleges will jump to six million. According to Duane Mehl, it may well be that the future will be dominated by a young adult culture. This generation is not like that of the past. There is a "new mood," which expresses itself in novels, clothes, alcohol, the city, sex, politics and religion. It is evident that ministry to the single young adult must realize a new approach in every area, especially in that of ethics, goals and values.<sup>3</sup>

## Aim

Hugh Anderson has characterized the present young adult generation by saying:

Young Adults we call them in nice circles. Others refer to these people as "playboys and glamour girls, Cliffdwellers." These people have not responded to our kindly invitations to "Come to Church and bring a friend with you." The few ministries of the Church that have made contact with these people have found it necessary to take the church to them - and in a variety of unusual ways.<sup>4</sup>

It is primarily important to understand this single young adult if ministry is to be carried out effectively. According to Charles Mowry, who is involved in work with the young adult, "if we are to minister in this day we must have a frank awareness of the contemporary culture." This would include, as Mehl points out, first of all the culture and then the reaction of the young adult in his own particular credo. Secondly, if effective ministry is to be carried out to the young adult, it is necessary to understand the man, his nature, his creation, and his existential moment. Finally, from this study of the culture and the needs of the single young adult, freedom and objectivity is needed to interrelate the findings and evidence into whatever form and expression of ministry they may dictate.<sup>5</sup>

The aim of this paper then is to record the findings of the authorities in the new field of the young adult. It will point up their conclusions on the contemporary culture. In addition, it is the aim of this paper to present what the authorities have precipitated in the needs, wants and fears of this developmental age group. With these two points in

mind, this paper will record various patterns and structures of ministry which have been based upon particular concerns and attitudes of ministry to the single young adult. For without a relevant meaning and without a correct understanding of the whole young adult, a concept of effective ministry is valueless.

#### Scope and Limitation

Since the rapid emergence of the unique young adult and his world, there has been little written authoritatively and conclusively on the young adult per se. Much, however, has been written concerning the sexual mores, vocational problems and the self expression of the youth of America. Adolescence is also treated at great length. But there is little material which concentrates directly on the present day phenomena of the young adult. Paul Maves, an authority on adulthood and education, describes young adulthood as the period between twenty and forty. However, he is not dealing with the unique present day post war baby boom. He is rather dealing with the first third of adulthood.<sup>6</sup> Many other authorities such as Gleason and Stock treat young adulthood in the same manner. This paper then draws on the more recent publications of which the bulk is found in periodical literature.

Although this paper deals with the single young adult it must be noted from the outset that it will not necessarily exclude the young married in this age group. For it can be often noted that the young marrieds without children in this age grouping will also evince some of the needs peculiar to



the young adult. Perhaps of greatest importance when we are considering this age group as a whole, the young adult whether he be single or married without children will demonstrate sympathy and juxtaposition with the "New Sentimentality" as outlined by Esquire magazine.

It is also important to caution against overgeneralizing about the young adult as compared to the generalizing about the child, for the range of individual differences is increased in proportion to the length of life. Due to the varying rates of speed in growth and change of individuals in accordance with the demands placed upon them, no pattern will adequately describe any one person. When the individual passes from adolescence into adulthood, he passes from an age-graded to a status graded society. However, as *Waves* points out, there is some correlation between age and status and there are similarities in the life histories of the persons who live in the same society and under the same culture.<sup>7</sup> This should serve the concept of ministry well because the single young adult is a person, not a branch of the population.<sup>8</sup> The scope of this paper gathers the similarities of the young adult and cautions against overgeneralizing. And as will be set forth, the effective concept of ministry will arise out of the similarities of this group.

In the area of form and meaning of ministry to the young adult there is still less written. The extent of the material dealt with three topics: the main concerns of ministry, basic attitudes and assumptions, and lastly, patterns and structures

of ministry. In the latter area the author was able to be selective in the total amount of material which was available.

#### Definition

In order to define the concentration of age when the single young adult is spoken of, there is an agreement among the authorities. A young adult in an interview related what she thought were the most difficult years of this particular age.

I think the age is between 20 and 23. That's much more difficult. There's a normative group when you're a teenager. You have a peer group to which you relate all of your actions.<sup>9</sup>

Mehl states that this present phenomenon encompasses the ages between eighteen and twenty four with the possibility that it may go to twenty five or higher.

It is a difficult age as another young adult relates;

Breaking into the adult world is tough. For as a young adult coming out into the world you've left your parents, you've left your home. You're strictly on your own. Here you are facing this big world by yourself, and you wouldn't fall back on your parents. You want to face things by yourself, and that's the hard part.<sup>10</sup>

And in this difficult time, it is obvious that the young adult is not turning to his church in all cases for guidance and help with his problems. In fact, it seems apparent that large numbers are drifting away from the church. The necessity of understanding both his culture and his need is paramount if the young adult is to be served.

This age of the single young adult is a time of great need. The young adult is trying to discover himself as a real person in the midst of conflicting ideas and values.

The church must realize these needs as Lloyd Burke says.

He who is admitted behind the facial curtain of the young adult and into their council discovers a fascinating world. In this "souped up" atmosphere, inexperience, immaturity, and imagination find expression in many ways. In art, music, poetry and paperbacks the nerve of the generation is laid bare. The symptoms of smut, rebellion and confession betray a generation crying out for an executive that which is now far from sublime. To hear what the young adult is asking for in the midst of all the words, to discover how valiantly he is struggling to find himself as a real person in the midst of ideas, to be help to him who seemly defies all help and ignores and belittles all that you know as a source of help to him, is the contribution we are called upon to make.<sup>11</sup>

The single young adult is communicating his needs. The fact that there exists such a person with needs, a person who is struggling for identity, intimacy and ideology is in itself a call for help. As Mehl summarizes, the world of the young adult carries with it a call to mission for the sake of Jesus Christ. There are a great number of them in our population today. "We cannot take young adults in the church, let alone the world, for granted."

#### Methodology

Ministry to people implies that aid is given to an area of need. Ministry cannot be thought of without a clear understanding of the needs of the person. Proceeding from this basic truth, this paper has encompassed into its scope the similarities of needs of the single young adult. These needs are understood in the context in which the individual young adult exists. Since the relationship of the context of existence and the needs of the individual will vary, this paper cannot set forth a "code of operation" applicable for

all cases. Rather it can only point to the basic concerns of ministry to the young adult, the attitudes and assumptions and several derived patterns and structures of ministry.

The first consideration then, will be an understanding of the "existential moment" in the cultural environment of the young adult. The second consideration will be toward an understanding of the similarity of needs. Derived from these two considerations will be the main concerns of ministry, the basic attitudes and assumptions and several patterns of ministry. By this an effective concept of ministry can be set forth.

#### THE SINGLE YOUNG ADULT IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

##### Present Day Culture

The young adult culture is increasingly evident in the large metropolitan areas of the United States. It is estimated that two out of every three single young adults migrate from the rural and town areas to the large urban areas. The reasons given for this move are for employment, but as one authority stated, "employment is not the whole reason." Many of these young adults want to leave the restrictions of home life behind. They want to go where "reality" and the action are. It is generally conceived that reality and action are in the city.<sup>12</sup> Young adults live together at "Y's" or in two and three story apartment buildings. Because of the move to the city for similar interests there tends to be great interaction within the group

but little interaction outside of the particular group. The young adults, in their interaction, develop and share their own ways of looking at things, talking about such subjects as sex, politics and philosophy and doing things.

The culture which develops out of the aggregate young adult group has recently been labeled the "New Sentimentality." There are five reasons for the emergence of this "New Sentimentality." Duane Mehl has characterized the sources. He states that a "popularized conception of Freudian and Darwinian theory have now filtered down into the subconscious of most young adults." What has been taught about natural selection, about the id and the superego has become self-determining. For example, if a man learns something about the nature of the id, this will make him act differently than if he would not have been exposed to the teaching. It is natural therefore that the individual may feel that he has the right and the freedom to explore and describe his true wants and desires. Secondly, scientific thought has pervaded all of society. The young adult is no exception. The young adult thinks scientifically. Thirdly, this technology has caused the expansion of the metropolitan areas. There has been a marked lag between the challenge which the culture proposes and the activity which the church undertakes to meet this challenge. Fourthly, because of the complex developments in the various arts and mediums of mass communications, man has different capabilities for thought and comprehension than he once had. Fifthly, the young adult with the remainder of

society has been effected by such developments as the population explosion, the rise of communism, wars, nuclear arms and space exploration. There is no way of ascertaining the depth to which these have effected man's image and concept of self.<sup>13</sup>

It is evident that the self stands at the center of this new "mood." All things are measured in relation to the value which the self places upon it. In the past decades this would be termed selfishness but present day writers dismiss this altogether. Thus there is a marked difference between the old style of life and the "New Sentimentality" or as some have termed it, "Existentialism." According to Mehl, "in the old way one had ideals, causes and goals that were in some way beneficent to all." In the New way of living, one's primary objective is to "make your life fit your style." Such phrases as "I'm not alive until I experience something real," are commonplace.

As a demonstration of their involvement in the "New Sentimentality," the young adults can speak positively about the great ideals and the faith of the past. But the young adult conforms so effortlessly to the "new mood" that the great faith of the past has little if no effect upon their life at all.

This culture bears the markings of transition. Taking into account the caution of Paul Maves against generalizing, we here are speaking of emerging trends. The young adult by his very nature is in a period of transition. He is casting

off the last vestiges of puberty and the high school peer group and he is beginning to establish his identity. Drawing on what he has received in his years prior to this time from heredity and from environment, he begins to derive the particular style of life which is most suited to him. One of these identity markings which he derives from the past is his particular vocation or career. For in such a choice the young adult will find his subsequent style of life. If the young adult becomes a teacher or a research engineer, the style of life will vary with his individual vocational choice.

This is also a time of trial and error. Talents and gifts can be tried out tentatively. Commitments can be made toward art or science, to politics or business in a measured form. The young adult decides as to the direction of his career. However, he finds himself in a society which is not willing to grant him a psychological moratorium for the purpose of gaining insights into his own capabilities and weaknesses.<sup>14</sup> This society calls upon the young adult to succeed. Almost all authorities are in agreement on this point, namely that the young adult is called upon to produce in areas of vocation and dependability. Mead states that the best situation for the development of the young adult would be if the society would grant an "as if" period in which the heights of aspirations and depths of despair could be both experienced without final economic, social or personal psychological consequences. She states that the contemporary culture does not have the facility nor the

provision for the granting of this favor.

What effects the young adult is seen in the world around him. With the rapid social change the remembered patterns of behavior of one's parents can no longer serve as a model for the generation which has emerged is a new one. In the place of parental patterns of behavior there are conspicuous patterns of consumption in all mediums of mass communication. The models which are pictured for the young adult are young couples who are just a few years older and a few income notches higher. These are the models of the desired security in vocation and in marriage.<sup>15</sup> The whole advertising front to the present culture is designed to stimulate interest in the almost mythical "preferred way of living." This stems from the trend that the truth today is to define success not in relation to the "Joneses" and the immediate neighbor alone but to define success in terms of the national image of the good life.<sup>16</sup>

According to Jellema, this developmental group makes its first god, the crowd. It is evident that the young adult is urged and even forced to conform and to be like everyone else. Jellema does not mean that this is done against one's will but he is demonstrating the priority that the young adult gives to the mode of living in his own age group.

In summary, according to Duane Mehl, the young adult lives in a totally different environment than did his parents. There have been contributory factors which have caused the young adult culture such as the move of young adults from the town



and rural areas to the city where reality and the action is. As stated before, from this coming together of the young adult there has arisen a new mode of living, or as some have termed it, the "New Sentimentality." This existential philosophy has received its source from a popularized conception of the teachings of Freud and Darwin, from the prevalent scientific thinking of the society, from the gap between the society and the church, from the complex developments in the arts and mediums of communication and from the threats and promises of the nuclear age which have effected man's concept of his selfhood.

This is the contemporary culture in which the young adult lives. The young adult has reacted to the society and has conversely developed a cult and creed within this whole of society.

#### The Cult and Creed of the Young Adult

The young adult cult expresses in intense form the stresses and strains which the highly commercialized civilization has placed upon life. The young adult is one of the victims in the race to involve himself in the preferred way or style of living. He is involved in following those who are in the know as to clothes, ways of thinking and behavioral patterns. This following after so consumes the young adult that if there is in him some ethical passion, he is fearful of showing it.<sup>17</sup> This is characteristic of the age for as Mehl points out, the beginning of the mood is uneasiness which is the feeling that "one is not quite what one is." This uneasiness is not like the phrase, "being not

all there," but it is rather the young adult feeling that he is "unauthentic or even hypocritical in a profound and essential way."<sup>18</sup> There is a marked desire for authenticity but authenticity in the young adult is by its very nature elusive and difficult to grasp. The question is therefore asked, how can I know when I am being completely authentic, or completely myself? What must be done in order to find out?

The attempted answer and solution lies in a further belief of the young adult. According to Kenniston, who is speaking particularly of college students, this age group of the present day have a cult of experience, which stresses in the words of one student, "the maximum number of sense experiences." Therefore, in the placement of value, the young adult regards highest this experience in all areas; in travel, artistic and expressive experience, the enjoyment of nature, the privacy of erotic love or the company of friends. Running parallel with this, the young adult searches for the self within the self rather than in society, in activity, or in commitment. The young adult believes that truth can be uncovered by looking into his own psyche.<sup>19</sup>

Seemingly it could be deduced that the young adult is revolting against society. They have contacts only within themselves and they avoid the balance of society. They make up their own ideas of morality. It seems that the young adult has cast off from the moorings of past traditions and faith. He has separated himself from the civic life.<sup>20</sup> These are true, but as Duane Mehl says, "It is a mistake to say

from an analysis that young adults are revolutionaries. The young adult tends to be a conformist. This is seen in their conformity to the "New Sentimentality" and the new mode of living." Rather the young adult culture is a protest against what they feel about the adult world. They tend to see the adult world as filled with stereotypes and Hypocrisy. In addition to this, their protest also arises from the source of guilt which they have incurred in revolting from the world.<sup>21</sup>

There are cases, however, in which the young adult accepts a "member" of the adult world. This is what some authorities have called the "guarantor." This person may be a superior on a job, a college professor or a successful businessman. He is generally one who has not judged the young adult and he is one who has indicated to the young adult how adulthood is carried out with success.

Lawrence Reese has pointed to the five general interests of the young adult. His listings agree basically with what most authorities posit as the young adult's main concerns. The first interest is the self; Secondly, the opposite sex; Third, the choice of a career; Four, an interest in religion and philosophy; and Five, an interest in community and world affairs.<sup>22</sup> These interests are also different from that of the preceding generation. One author has stated that the young adults give sex an extraordinarily high rating.

The trend today is toward the very open discussions of sex, in both analysis and practice. Most young adults today believe that sexual relations before marriage are an open

option. In this regard, as compared with the generation before them, young adults are not romantic about sex. As will be discussed later, the young adult has a need for intimacy. A sexual experience, therefore, may grant to the young adult a type of temporary intimacy. In another case it may allow for a good friendship. In all, the young adult sees that having an affair is a didactic experience. In the experience one has learned something about himself.

This represents a marked change in the moral attitude in comparison with the morals of the past generations. However, one young adult reflects her morals as being influenced by something other than her desire to explore the concept of the self.

I think that the thing that holds most people to their own kind of morals, whatever they are, is what others will say and what would happen if everybody found out. I suppose God comes into it somewhere when you feel like you've found out whether you really are or not. someone might bring it up years later. . . . embarrassing my parents and friends.<sup>24</sup>

Winston Ehrmann states his reason for the change in the sexual mores.

Single persons, however, see marriage as the end stage and a glorious fulfillment in a gradual transition from random dating, going steady, becoming engaged, and getting married. As they proceed through this evolution, they more and more see themselves as being married.

He also points to the fact that great personal freedom gives young people the opportunity for sexual activities. In addition to this, the stimulation of society on the personal freedom through the mediums of mass communication has the opposite effect of restraint. Finally, this freedom

which is possessed by the young adult also means that there will be a greater exploitation of one sex by the other.<sup>25</sup> This has devolved to an expression of a marked drive for young people to marry early because they cannot quite cope with the fact that they are missing out on the experience. Margaret Mead has also made similar observations and she points to the immediate sexual gratification which marriage would propose. She states that an early marriage marks a degree of success or an early attainment of the full adult status. This includes parenthood, the possession of the material securities, which seem to indicate successful adult living.<sup>26</sup> One young adult has given voice to this principle.

Of course the fact that you're not married or engaged is another factor. So long as this is true, other people don't regard you as an adult - just something to be ignored.<sup>27</sup>

The stress of the time of the life of the young adult with respect to sex and marriage, the "preferred way of living," the threat of complete impersonalization and the loss of identity could be best summed up by the words of a young adult which were written at the beginning of the seventh decade of the twentieth century.

My picture of the young adult is like a machine who is almost depersonalized. In the midst of the gigantic apparatus of this technological world, he has become a lone machine. And without a manipulator, he has become detached and disengaged.

Society has become secularized for him - he has lost the sacredness of life. He is now occupied with the struggle for status. In other words, he is trying to meet the exaggerated demands of the high and mighty society.<sup>28</sup>

The young adult knows Ruth Benedict declares that man is a "glob of protoplasm to be molded by his society." They see that free will has been written off in the text books of psychology as an outdated and outmoded concept. It is obvious however, that Christianity has contradicted these sayings by intelligent men when it affirms that "man is created in the image of God - self-conscious and self directing." The young adult hears Christianity proclaim God who transcends society and who has broken into history to free man. But as Robertson states in his discussion of the Church Institutional, when the church becomes another block in the power structure, when it is intent on producing morally good citizens, a refusal to conform is made by the young adult.<sup>29</sup> Duane Mehl would agree for he views the young adult rebelling against religion for highly conservative reasons.<sup>30</sup>

Roy Larson has assumed the role of a young adult in his "Memo to a Parson from a Wistful Young Man." He writes:

In short, Pastor, the average church stands a perfect symbol of nearly everything I despise, - false gentility, empty sentiment, emotional impoverishment, intellectual mediocrity, and spiritual tepidity. Maybe it's my pride speaking, but I just don't want to be identified with an institution like that.

Robertson expresses sympathy for the young adult who sees the apparent difference in Christianity, namely, in what is said by the Christian and what is actually done by the Christian. He realizes that this dichotomy places a test upon the validity of Christianity itself. Robertson further states that the young adult conceives (in his "commitment"

to Christianity) of himself as a part of the people of God but the church institutional does not necessarily mean that it is also the people of God.

In summary, the cult and creed of the young adult world expresses the stresses and the strains which the modern commercial civilization has placed upon it. He views himself as bound up in a subconscious race to follow the "preferred way of living." He feels that he is not attaining what he feels he should be in such words as, "one is not quite what one is."

Therefore the young adult tries every available means to realize himself. This is the cult of experience. This experience runs the gamut of humanness finding its expression in self gratification, sexual interests, outlining new ideals and mores, and a drive to make one's life fit one's style. All of these are undergirded and overarched by the concept of the freedom of the personal.

The next consideration, which has been implied throughout is revealing the similarities of the needs of the single young adult. We here must be cautioned not to accept the following discussion as a general principle but an indication of the similarities in the life needs of the single young adult. It is primarily important, as Pierre Babin relates, that we must deal with the single young adult as a person and not as a population segment. The fact of the young adult as a unique phenomena is in itself a call to minister on a personal basis.

## THE SINGLE YOUNG ADULT IN NEED

The single young adult is struggling with a number of problems at any given time. Our discussion will center on the three basic needs of the young adult. These needs are the need of identity, the need of intimacy, and the need of ideology. These needs were outlined and elucidated in an article in the Chicago Theological Seminary Register.  
Identity

The young adult has a distinct need for identity. He is anxious about achieving adulthood and finding his style of life. The highest aspects of this achievement of identity are marriage and the choice of a career. For in the attainment of these two aspects, it is conceded that they mark the successful management of entering and finding security in the adult world.

Identity then, is the feeling I am. "I can cause things to happen." It is reflective of the Cartesian adage, "I think, therefore I am." The young adult desires to feel that at some significant points he is in charge of his life. He wishes to feel that he is making himself and the world in which he lives. He proceeds under this thinking because the young adult feels that he is a persistent unit. He has a background of heredity and environment from which he has developed and the young adult feels that this will have a maintaining continuity in what he will be. The young adult sees himself, therefore in one perspective of continuity.<sup>31</sup>



Underlying the basic search for personal identity then, is the desire for authenticity. As Erickson believes, many young adults are committed to an ideal of "all-ness" or "nothingness." They would rather face nothingness than give into a faith which in their own thinking would be nothing more than a "cant of pious words, a collective will, a conscience which is expended in a stickling for empty forms," or a reason that was meaningless busy work.<sup>32</sup> Margaret Mead sees this problem assuming overwhelming proportions when the individual in late adolescence faces the world in his search for identity. She states:

Today's problem remains a search for a meaningful identity in a world which is seen as too large, too complex, too unpredictable, too likely to collapse into chaos, too weak to provide a framework for the individual life.<sup>33</sup>

This testing and selection and the final arrival at an identity which takes place in the individual young adult is a task which is peculiar to the person of this age group between adolescence and adulthood. Mead states further the purpose for desiring to reach this identity of the personal self. She states that the individual seeks this identity so that he can lead a "creative life with freedom and dignity."

This identity then assumes that this does not end solely in the individual for as Hendrik Ruitenbeek points out, this identity occurs in relation of the individual to his environment and society in general. The very choices and decisions which the young adult seeks to make show the attempt which the individual is seeking to make to society. Ruitenbeek goes on to say;

these very choices and decisions are often the source of their difficulty in identifying themselves with the society that requires those choices to be made. Thus, the roots of the problem of individual identity in our society are to be found in the intricate relationships of self and environment and of self and society.<sup>34</sup>

The problem is further heightened by the fact that these relationships have the power to dictate to a degree the the individual's personal and his cultural identity. For this reason the young adult does not find himself a completely unique individual. For the same relationships which effect him effect others who are in like relationships to the whole society. Thus the young adult is bound to others in his particular developmental group by virtue of his common ground of personal and cultural relationships.

In this developmental age group the identity search becomes acute and continues to persist relentlessly for the society continues to demand success and perfection. But as Mead reflects, "we become more conscious of our lack of provision for this search."

### Intimacy

Ross Snyder has perhaps made the most singular contribution to this area in his work on the loneliness of the young adult. The following quote will serve to reflect the pain of loneliness and its subsequent desire to intimacy.

I feel that I am lost, that the world is being run wrong. Here all is death, nothing matters. There is no center, top or bottom. Only the chaotic world is left, and it's gone crazy. It babbles, foams and sputters like a dying sun and turns on its side to

die, twitching.

To the young adult life itself means being involved in a "fast moving present." "Look at me! I'm a man with feelings and emotions, with wants and with a life to give. I am the sort of life that lives through encounter, through give and take." The young adult cannot be satisfied with being on the fringe of what seems important. He states, "I can't be simply an ant in a long stream of identical fellows building a mound." <sup>36</sup> Paul Maves tersely remarks that the young adult has needs and desires which are social. These needs and desires cannot go on at any length without an effort made by the young adult in the direction of establishing a close give and take relationship with those of his own group or otherwise. <sup>37</sup> This does not mean that the young adult is looking for a passing encounter. He deeply desires to talk and share his feelings about the meanings of life. The young adult is not satisfied for example with the glib encounter in the "beer bust" which afterwards leaves "only a faintly remembered glow." <sup>38</sup> Intimacy and its search is one of the distinctive life tasks of the young adult. This search for the other at times can become very excruciating. <sup>39</sup> One young adult gives an indication of the pain of this loneliness.

When I feel lonely, I feel that there's no one I can talk to who will realize that I'm me. So there is not much use in doing anything worthwhile if no one cares. Loneliness takes the heart out of much that we would do. When I'm lonely, I feel purposeless, tired, confused, weak and trapped. I picture myself as caught in a hard shell from which I speak in hollow tones. There is an opening through which I reach out hands to grasp

quickly the hand of another. When I feel I'm peeking<sup>40</sup> out desperately from the shell - then I feel lonely.

The "tragedy" of loneliness of the young adult lies in his own situation. The young adult can go for days coming in contact facially with his own age group and yet he may still be a very lonely person. Snyder says, that there is no more "tragic form of loneliness than occurs when you stand face to face before another person and experience the inability to communicate."<sup>41</sup> It is apparent that loneliness then carries with it the idea of a personal failure. For the young adult sees life consisting of "love, encounter, communication, fighting shoulder to shoulder for a common cause." He conceives that to be human means to be a dyad. Snyder reflects man's deep potential for life is the "I - Thou" sensitivity. When the young adult sensing this potential feels himself to be lonely, and not experiencing the "I - Thou," the sense of dyad, then he grants that his loneliness is an indication that he has personally failed in his life as a human being.

Guilt then arises, for the young adult sees himself to blame for his failure. The reason for this failure lies in his definition of loneliness in relation to the self. Part of the problem lies in the young adult's pressures of conformity. One young adult has stated his self accusing attitude.

Perhaps, I'm thinking too much how to please them, how to pile upon them my gratefulness.<sup>42</sup>

The inner loneliness seeks to be erased. Primarily the

intensity of the loneliness of the young adult is found in the hunger for the dyad - two for each other. With this comes the uncertainties of whether he will find the right person and the girl whether she will find the right husband.<sup>43</sup> A young man gave voice to the tension of the uncertainty and the hunger for the dyad when he said before he had found his fiancée.

There come a time when you want somebody all your own. You're just tired of being alone, tired of going around with one person after another without anything seeming to be serious. You begin to wonder if you're ever going to get married, and so forth, and then it gets pretty lonely. But it's not so much a loneliness from a lack of friends but it's an inner kind of loneliness.<sup>44</sup>

By the late twenties the young adult has encompassed a host of experiences and he has been a partner in enough passing dyads. The extent of these experiences has left him cautious and keenly aware of his sensitivity in "regard to the possibility for him of a relationship of the nature of Buber's "I - Thou." This is not to mean that the ultimate goal is only the marriage of man and wife. This points up again the need for the young adult to come into communion with others who are willing to establish a relationship. Ross Snyder concludes the idea of this sensitivity for the "I - Thou" relationship by asking the question. "Would the church mean to them a world encompassing communion of the animate and the inanimate brought together in Christ, in whom all things hold together?" Would the church mean to the young adult, a community wherein they are members one of another and motivated by the "living presence of the Holy

Spirit." Would the church mean to them a community where each member respected the judgment and the conscience in the depth of one another's heart?<sup>45</sup> From the depth of the personality it is apparent that the need for intimacy is great indeed. The depth of this need as Ross Snyder refers to it, may find its culmination in the community animated and moved through the presence of the Spirit.

As was referred to earlier, the presence of the adult "guarantor" is a special need of the young adult in the need for intimacy. The "guarantor" has already attained a position of solidarity in society. In addition to this the "guarantor" accepts the young adult as he is and allows the young adult to be honest and at ease while he himself exudes the same attitude toward the young adult. In such a relationship the young adult can speak freely of those things which are meaningful to him. The benefit is twofold. For in the talking the "guarantor" can understand the young adult and his existential moment. In like manner, the young adult by the dynamics present in such a relationship, can gain insight into his own selfhood.

Finally, if loneliness is not resolved in a meaningful relationship of the dyad or in the community, it has a "component of resentment both as the cause and as the effect.

#### Ideology

There appears to be a difference in word usage among various authors in the area of the ideology of the young adult.

Duane Mehl has posited that the young adult is intensely involved in varying degrees with the "New Sentimentality." For this reason, he believes that those young adults who desire and need an ideology are in the minority. However, Mehl is conceiving of ideology in the narrow sense. This would be exemplified in such things as the Peace Corps and volunteer work. The article, "Design for Growth for the Young Adult," approaches the question with greater task. This article states that the young adult is painfully aware of the need for decisions in his life. The majority of the young adults are driven to choose new devotions and abandon old ones. It follows, according to the line of reasoning of the author, that the young adult is most willing to accept a proposed ideological system which "promise a new world perspective at the price to an abandonment and repudiation of an old ideological system."<sup>47</sup> Here ideology is used in the sense of life meaning or life frame of reference. This is the concept which is treated as a particular need of the young adult. In this sense an Ideology offers;

an overly simplified and yet determined answers to exactly those vague inner states with urgent questions which arise in consequence of the identity conflict. An ideology channels a youth's forceful earnestness and sincere asceticism, its need for repudiation and devotion, its search for excitement and eager indignation. It offers a combination of freedom and discipline of adventure and tradition, and invites youth to a frontier where man's struggle is most alive.<sup>48</sup>

Mehl approaches the same need under a different heading. He feels that the young adult must first of all have a meaning for his life. He states that the young adult must

Have a frame of reference from which they can view the world and interpret what happens to it. Erikson in an edited article has defined the ideological need of the individual under three points. In this regard he also posits, as Mehl, the need for the individual to be found in a certain frame of reference. First, the young adult needs "a world image convincing enough to support the collective and individual sense of reality." This is to say that the individual must have an image of his relationship to the universe. Secondly, an ideology offers an invitation to participate in the "stream of history making." Thirdly, an ideology is the "relocation of the habitual center of personal energies." Erikson believes that the ideology which makes an appeal to the young adult would be one which would offer a frame of orientation and devotion as well as repudiation.<sup>49</sup>

There is a marked interrelationship between identity, intimacy, and life meaning or ideology. The three cannot be thought of separately but are effected by one another. Thus it is necessary to understand the similarities of the needs which are peculiar to the young adult developmental group. In no other stage of their life is the need so marked and pronounced for the fulfillment of the three needs which have just been reviewed. Failure to achieve successfully any one of the three needs will result in a subsequent lack of full attainment of success in the remainder of the other need areas.



## THE MEANING AND FORM OF MINISTRY

## The Concern

Duane Mehl considers the objectives in ministry to the young adult in the light of a "theology of response to the needs of the young adult." It is imperative that the concern for ministry arises out of a deep understanding of the contemporary moment and the peculiar needs. There are many reasons, however, which are put forth against any specific ministry to the single young adult. Such reasoning states that a great portion of the young adult population will enter into the armed forces. It is difficult to serve the group if the majority move off the college campus. Many of the young adults marry. Others move away to find jobs and pursue their vocations in the large metropolitan areas. In effect, a moratorium of ministry to the young adult is declared until the time when the young adult returns to the church to become the "vital force of the next generation."<sup>50</sup> Therefore it is easy to forget and to misplace the young adult. However, when the truth is seen by the church and its pastors, they may counter in reliance by saying that the young adults are not interested in the church. Therefore no specific program is offered for them.<sup>51</sup> The resultant is the vicious circle," the young adult does not become active in the church because there is no program for him and the church does not provide a program because the young adult is not interested.

If the problem is to be dealt with it must be approached. Roy Larson cautions against approaching the ministry to the young adult without first understanding him, when he writes in the "Memo to a Parson from a Wistful Young Man." Here Larson is assuming the role of a young adult in order to make the point clear.

Quite honestly, when I first received your letter, my immediate impulse was to send back a postcard with nothing but the question, "why do you want to communicate with young adults?" I hope I don't strike you as being overly sensitive, but I have grown to be deeply suspicious of anyone who is over eager to "communicate" with me. As a matter of fact, I think you can put this down as some kind of a general axiom: The guy who is too eager to reach young adults is not going to reach them." He makes you wonder, what's he after?<sup>52</sup>

This is not to say that any approach will be viewed with suspicion. On the contrary, for Mehl states that there is a new breed within the church. The young adult may be eager and willing to follow new things that have not been tried before. George Gleason is in agreement with this for he sees the church as already having helped the young adult at some significant points in his development. He also senses that the young adult possesses a moving love for the church in the expressions of his wants and needs.<sup>53</sup> He further states that with this statement of their needs, he is convinced the church can meet these needs.

As mentioned before, one of the reasons that the young adult gives for his desire not to identify with the church is the apathy and the seeming dichotomy in the Christian life. Anderson warns against accepting this as absolute truth, for all men have and hunger for fulfillment of their

spiritual needs. But this should serve one to understand better the truth of what lies below the surface of the young adult.

If only we could probe beneath the calm exterior to the intimacies of their existence, we would find for sure a wistfulness that knows the torment of doubt and fear, fear of the cosmos, and fear of man himself.<sup>54</sup>

It is the duty of the church, as Anderson believes, to understand this modern temper which is evidenced in clear manifestation among the young adult. It seems apparent in the present "wistful generation" that the truth is that they would gladly have a solid hold upon belief in God, "but they are sad that they cannot find it." Anderson feels that this generation could be a "great ally of the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen in its fullness." It seems apparent, however, that the leaders of the church intent to follow old forms and securities are guilty of presenting a God that is too small to meet headon with the "desperate yearnings of a distracted world," and they remain obscure and irrelevant because they do not understand or realize the plight of modern man. Furthermore, as Anderson states, their response is scolding and chiding the young adult who questions and who appears by his questioning to be faithless. The capstone of the erring lies in the fact that they continue to teach that "faith is easy to come by." In such a distracted world perhaps what is most needed among the young adults as Mehl states is a ministry "which illuminates the grandeur of God's creative and redeeming purpose in Christ for the

whole world.<sup>56</sup> The problem is that the young adult assumes that the world belongs to the world. If God is in it, says the young adult, he must be on the outside. Mehl continues by saying that the young adult must look at Jesus Christ and as being confronted by him that they may come to understand "that in him the world was created," in Him it has been redeemed, in Him it shall be judged and brought to that end which God has willed since the beginning of time. If any by-pass is made to this truth, the church loses its place and its worth to the young adult.

Thus the minister and the church who would minister effectively must first be concerned with a serious restudy of the nature and the mission of the church. Then from such introspection and examination, the church will see the necessity for concern with the situation and the needs of the young adult. Lloyd Burke has gone a step further and characterized the source of this concern by the church. He feels that the church is showing a greater concern for the young adult of today because of the possibility that the church has a "sensitivity to the needs of the young adult" which has been stimulated because the young adult himself has challenged the church to have a concern for him. The basic concern of ministry to the young adult, then, is the meeting of the needs which this group seeks fulfillment of. The three basic needs of the young adult have been discussed earlier. In this regard, Duane Mehl adds two concerns of ministry. He believes that the young adults are inclined

"to accept or affirm the world as it is, without having to explain where it came from or what it means." For in their affirmations they are indicating their need to be involved and to take part in those things which are life. To seriously question the world and its existence is undertaken by the young adult. Very often the most perplexing questions are raised. The inclination, however as stated before is to affirm the world as it is. Secondly, self-centeredness is a characteristic of the young adult. This is also according to Mehl a valid concern in the ministry to the young adult. If the young adult lives in a society which tells him that his life must be clutched and hoarded for himself, a strong concern for the self is the resultant. It is obvious that ministry to the young adult bears with it a confrontation of radical change. For when one comes under the liberty of the "Spirit" and is grounded in Christ there is a consequential change from strong ego centrality to responding to Christ by the Spirit. It can be seen however, that the two concerns immediately referred to are closely related to the three basic needs. Self-Centeredness and the Affirmation of the world as it is are exaggerations of the need for identity, intimacy and ideology. These two point up and clarify the urgency for fulfillment of these needs of the young adult.

Finally, one concern which must stand out above all is that the church be found faithful to the word of God and His revelation in Jesus Christ. God does not require that

the church must solve all of the social problems and all of the needs in the life of the young adult but of one thing the church is required, namely, that it be found faithful in His Word.<sup>57</sup> This truth is paramount in a young adult program set up by Duane Mehl in his workbook, It's a Young Adult World.

#### Attitudes

In respect to the attitudes which must be present in ministry to the young adult, Lloyd Burke feels that there must be three vital attitudes. Acceptance is the primary attitude toward the young adult. The church dignifies the young adult and assists him in search for his life's center in an "Organization Man society where the personal identity is submerged." In this manner the young adult will seek to be himself if he realizes that the church believes what he says. The young adult will experience the truth of his sonship with God and will realize all of the rights and privileges which are his in such a relationship.

The second important attitude is to realize that the young adult has something to offer the church. Here the church must be aware that it is not only a "preaching post," but also a listening post. The young adult which comes to the church is not uneducated. He may not be well integrated with the life of the church and he may not appear to have the proper life perspective, but he does have insight and experience. Only by listening can the church realize the

extent of vocabulary, slang and thought patterns which will further clarify needs and problem areas.

The intimacy of acceptance and the identity strengthened through recognition go a long way to help the young adult develop the ideology, the life purpose and that life related activity that are distinctly him.<sup>58</sup>

The third attitude is the embracing sense of community. The young adult may live an entire week without experiencing a true sense of community. The young adult may live in an apartment house where he does not even know the name of his neighbor. He may ride with commuters whom he does not know. The entertainment community which the young adult frequently participates in is not real. This is why the young adult expresses the desire to meet a man with whom she can share "company, ideals and life." As Burke states, if the church realizes its claim to minister to the young adult then the church must also realize that the community of believers is an "all consuming and all embracing."<sup>59</sup>

#### Patterns and Structures

There are many and varied patterns and structures of ministry to the single young adult. In ministering to the young adult it would seem easy to decide on a certain approach and present it. However, Allen Ellsworth cautions against such procedure when he says that "the pastor and the congregation should concentrate on the young adult as persons and not on the forms of the activities in which they engage."<sup>60</sup> With an understanding of the person it is possible to develop a pattern of ministry. In this regard

significant efforts have been made by the church in the area of patterns and forms which the ministry to the young adult may assume. It is worthwhile then, to see the direction which the underlying concerns and attitudes have taken.

One of the most significant thrusts which ministry to the young adult in the metropolitan area has taken is dialogue inclusive of all young adults whether they are confessing Christians or not. And as will be noted later, this dialogue is very often among the young adults themselves. Of important note is the fact that dialogue is carried out on an informal basis. Psychologically, "formality of structure invites rigidity of thought, while informality breeds flexibility and openmindedness." This concept finds manifestation in the coffee house where the program is to raise questions rather than to give answers.<sup>61</sup> The informal structure of the coffee house serves to convince those engaged in the activity that the questioning is sincere.

Murray Ross would agree with this thinking, for his research shows that 71.9 percent of the young adults polled thought that some discussion or study with friends is more useful and also more effective than a straight lecture method by a minister, priest or rabbi.<sup>62</sup> This type of ministry shows that the church is seeking to leave the doors of the church proper and meet the young adult in his own environment. There are many cases where success has followed a pattern of ministry which allows for free reign in discussion stimulated by an able leader.



Charles Mowry has gathered information on such a pattern of formal to informal dialogue in ministry to the single young adult. He points to the case of Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village, where the membership numbers eighty-five. In addition to the regular membership, there are over three hundred young adults who feel some connection with its ministry. The Pastor of Judson Memorial states;

At Judson the effort has been to get into communication with persons to gain the opportunity to speak, live, work, worship or whatever it be with them.<sup>63</sup>

On Wednesday evenings, there is a weekly "Hall of Issues" where persons may come and discuss with others and with a leader, the present day issues that have an effect upon their lives and the world around them. Mowry relates another case in Washington, D.C., where the Church of the Savior has begun and initiated a coffee house. Members of the church join in the conversations with young adults around the coffee tables.

Perry believes that the most favorable feature of the coffee house is the neutrality of ground. Neither group, those serving and participating in the conversation or the patrons, feels compromised by drinking coffee. It is possible to become actively involved in the conversation or if one is disinterested he can simply divert his attention to studying or leafing through a paperback. This neutrality "used honestly can be a powerful witness that Christians do not need to pull any punches."<sup>64</sup>

There are other forms and patterns of ministry to the

young adult. One of these forms takes place with a special program for young adults within the overall church program. Duane Mehl has presented such a program outline where a leader notably a young adult himself would initiate honest discussion and interaction among the group. This interaction would take place within the church locus itself and would be centered most significantly in a young adult Bible class.<sup>65</sup> However, interest must be taken by one person within the group before an organization for the young adult will have any meaning. The interests of the group leader will also of necessity reflect the general interest of the group. It must be also realized that the young adult in the church does not consider himself to be bound to the group. If he experiences boredom or lack of interest in what is being said and done, he will not return to meet with the group.

Other areas of structure of ministry to the young adult are few, but in them the greatest promise lies when the needs of the young adult are clearly understood. In areas of service to the church such as teaching and tutoring young children as well as offering their own particular talents to the church, the young adult can be perhaps best served. Here the initiative lies with the young adult himself. He can express himself according to his own particular abilities. However, this specific area of pattern in ministry is not dealt with and is overlooked.

#### CONCLUSION

The present day young adult cult is a unique cultural

and developmental segment of the population of the United States. This group is faced with urgent and in some cases overwhelming needs. In addition to these needs, the young adult lives in culture which does not assist him in the fulfillment of these needs. It is therefore, impossible to conceive of ministry without first understanding these needs. It is also necessary to be frankly aware of the culture in which the young adult lives. According to Mehl, many congregations should assess their present program for young adults. They should gather statistics on the involvement of the young adult in the life of the congregation, in its worship and education. From their findings and understanding of the total situation both the church and the young adult, a ministry must begin.

There are two aspects of ministry to the single young adult which are important and significant. The first of these is flexibility. The church will not be successful in ministry to the young adult when it seeks to impose a program which the young adult has already rejected. Therefore, new and varied approaches must be initiated in the light of the particular "existential moment" of the local young adult group. The young adult is searching and seeking fulfillment for his needs. If it is apparent that his needs will not find satisfaction in one area, he will look elsewhere until he finds a stimulation for meeting his needs. Interest must be maintained. In order to maintain the interest, life related activities and discussions must be granted the

young adult.

The second important aspect of ministry are the young adults themselves. According to Mehl, the young adult of today is of a "new Breed." He is willing to try new ways for service to the church. This may be a "back door" way in which to serve the young adult; but it may be a good way. The young adult may find his most satisfying moments offering himself in service in as many different ways as his talents. In his service he must evaluate and examine his reasons and purposes for doing such work. Under the guidance of an able leader, not necessarily the pastor, he will see his identity arising out of the context of the community.

Perhaps it could be said that there is, humanely speaking, no more difficult time of life to understand and deal with than the period and phenomena of the young adult. Miracles cannot be expected in most cases, for the present day "winds of doctrine" and the complex culture will not cease to have an influence upon the young adult. This tension will attain ever greater heights than previously experienced by the young adult before he comes under a true Christian confession and commitment. This final note then demonstrates the call which the young adult makes to the church. And it is the church which proclaims the power and offers by command and authority of God, the means of Grace, whereby the man may come to share in the realization of the Body of Christ.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Charles E. Mowry, "Significant Efforts in Ministering to Young Adults," Religion in Life, (Summer 1962), p.383.

<sup>2</sup>Duane Mehl, It's A Young Adult World ( St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), p. introduction.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., introduction.

<sup>4</sup>Hugh Anderson, "The Wistful Generation: Reaching Young Adults Today," Religion in Life (Summer 1962), p.332.

<sup>5</sup>Mowry, p. 383.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Maves, Understanding Ourselves as Adults (New York: Abingdon Press, 1959), p.142.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>8</sup>Pierre Babin, Crisis of Faith (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), p. 121.

<sup>9</sup>"Young Adults on Adulthood, Morality and The Church," The Chicago Theological Seminary Register (Vol. XLIX, Number 8, November 1959), p. 27.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Bloyd Burke, "Ministering to the Young Adult in a Business Culture," The Chicago Theological Seminary Register (Vol. XLIX, Number 8, November 1959), p. 40.

<sup>12</sup>Duane Mehl, "The New Breed," This Day (June 1965 ), p. 7.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>14</sup>Margaret Mead, "The Young Adult," Values and Ideals of American Youth. Eli Grinzberg editor. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 46.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Van D. Spurgeon, "The American College Student Today," Encounter (Vol. 23, Number 1, October 1964), p.49.

<sup>17</sup>Ross Snyder, "To Be Lonely: Its Structure and Experience For A Young Adult," Religion in Life (Vol XXXI, Number 3, Summer 1962), p. 348. Hereafter referred to as TBL.

<sup>18</sup>Mehl, It's A Young Adult World, p. 9.

- 19 Kenneth Keniston, "Social Change and Youth in America," Daedalus ( Vol. XCI, Winter 1962), p. 160.
- 20 Snyder, p. 348.
- 21 Mehl, The New Breed, p. 10.
- 22 Lawrence Reese, Youth Work in Today's Church (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956), p. 10.
- 23 Mehl, It's a Young Adult World, p. 11.
- 24 Young Adults on Adulthood, Morality and the Church." p. 29.
- 25 Winston Ehrmann, "Changing Sexual Mores," Values and Ideals of American Youth, edited by Eli Grinzberg ( New York: Columbia University press, 1961), p. 69.
- 26 Mead, p. 42.
- 27 "Young Adults on Adulthood, Morality and The Church," p. 27.
- 28 Snyder, p. 348.
- 29 Mehl, The New Breed, p. 8.
- 30 Alton C. Robertson, "The Student and The Church Institutional," Theology Today (Vol. XIX, July 1962), p. 194.
- 31 Ross Snyder, "A Design of Growth for the Young Adult," The Chicago Theological Seminary Register (Vol. XLIX, Number 8, November 1959), p. 4. Hereafter referred to as DGTYA.
- 32 Robertson, pp. 14-15.
- 33 Mead, p. 45.
- 34 Hendrik Ruitenbeek, The Individual and the Crowd (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964), p. 9.
- 35 Snyder, TBL, p. 341.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Maves, p. 52.
- 38 Snyder, TBL, p. 345.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.

- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid., p. 345.
- 43 Ibid., p. 342.
- 44 Snyder, DGTYA, p. 30.
- 45 Snyder, TBL, p. 350.
- 46 Ibid., p. 346.
- 47 Snyder, DGTYA, p. 8
- 48 Ibid., p. 7.
- 49 Ibid., p. 9.
- 50 Mehl, It's A Young Adult World, p. 8.
- 51 Murray G. Ross, Religious Beliefs of Youth (New York: Association Press, 1950), p. 21.
- 52 Roy Larson, "Memo to a Parson, from a Wistful Young Man," Religion in Life (Summer 1962), p. 352.
- 53 Anderson, p. 334.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Mehl, The New Breed, p. 41
- 57 Burke, p. 39
- 58 Ibid., p. 41
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Allen S. Ellsworth, At Work with Young Adults, p. 30.
- 61 John D. Perry, The Coffee House Ministry, Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1966), p. 49.
- 62 Ross, p. 146.
- 63 Mowry, p. 377.
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- 65 Mehl, It's A Young Adult World, p. 30.

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